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EU Memory Politics: Shifting towards securitisation?

Andrea Apollonio

Abstract

This article offers an overview of the evolution of EU memory politics, arguing that recent developments signal a potential shift in the main function of collective memory: from a political resource to promote reconciliation and legitimise integration through shared narratives, to its increasing use as a strategic tool in EU foreign relations and international disputes. To support this interpretative endeavour, the article critically discusses the relevant scholarly literature, i.e. empirical studies on the EU institutions' memory narratives and policies, and primary sources, i.e. institutional documents (parliamentary resolutions, treaties, declarations and high-level speeches).

Keywords: EU Memory Politics; Collective Memory; Political Narratives.

Profilo Autrice

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Indice

1. Introduction

This article offers an overview of the evolution of EU memory politics, arguing that recent developments signal a potential shift in the main function of collective memory: from a political resource to promote reconciliation and legitimize integration through shared narratives, to its increasing use as a strategic tool in EU foreign relations and international disputes. To support this interpretative endeavour, the article critically discusses the relevant scholarly literature, i.e. empirical studies on the EU institutions' memory narratives and policies, and primary sources, i.e. institutional documents (parliamentary resolutions, treaties, declarations and high-level speeches) identified as prominent and significant following two criteria: the innovative character of their content and approach, as well as their recurrence in the intertextual references of EU documentary production.

The concept of "EU memory politics" identifies an unstructured field of political interactions in which different memory entrepreneurs mobilise Europe's past within the EU institutions to support projects in the present. This includes the legitimisation of European integration through the negotiation of its historical significance and the construction of a sense of community and belonging; but also, more ephemeral and short-term goals, such as the adoption of specific measures in different EU policy areas, or the building of consensus in the national constituency (Foret, Calligaro, 2012). The article thus seeks to illustrate how these institutional mnemonic practices and narratives have evolved along with the advancement of European integration and the changing socio-political conditions of the continent (Verovšek, 2020; Sierp 2023); what "past" they have interpreted and mobilised from time to time, through what tools and strategies and for what purposes.

The deepening of European integration has been accompanied by the development of the EU institutions' symbolic and ritual repertoire, aiming to establish a "European imagined community" on cultural grounds (Foret, 2008; 2010; 2025). These institutions, at various stages of their development, have employed different mnemonic dimensions and tools to historically anchor the integration project, reinforce its legitimacy, and respond to the need to foster a sense of European community belonging. The mnemonic dimensions include i) leaders and achievements of European integration; ii) European civilisation and its heritage; iii) the Second World War and 20th century totalitarianisms (Prutsch,

2015). The commemorative tools and strategies include museal initiatives, days of commemoration, and soft-law instruments such as parliamentary resolutions. The modalities and purposes of the use of these memory narratives changed according to the historical phase, as will be illustrated more extensively in the following paragraphs[1]. In the early stages of integration, literature observes symbolic and abstract references to a history of division and war between Europeans. From the 1970s onwards, this abstract use of the past was supplemented by a more tangible framing of national memories and heritage as components of a wider European identity, alongside the commemoration of the integration process itself. Since the 1990s, the remembrance of the responsibilities and genocidal crimes of Nazi-fascism has gained prominence. The national capacity to confront the memory of the Holocaust became a soft criterion for accession to the European project. This marked the point at which the EU fully entered the field of memory politics, which had previously been the exclusive domain of nation states (Sierp, 2020b). A decisive watershed, arguably opening a fourth phase, is identified as occurring between 2004 and 2007 with the "great enlargement" to several Central and Eastern European countries. Representatives of former Eastern Bloc countries challenged Western narratives about the beginning of the Second World War and its conclusion, introducing the memory of decades of Soviet rule and tragedies associated with totalitarian communism (Sierp, 2021; Calligaro, Foret, 2012; Littoz-Monnet, 2012). This final phase corresponds with the politicisation of European memory politics as a controversial and contested field (Tóth, 2019). Analysing trends emerging since the 9th legislature (2019–2024), this article concludes that, initially conceived mainly as instruments to promote reconciliation and legitimise integration through shared narratives, European memory frameworks are progressively assuming the role of a strategic political resource in EU external relations. This signals a potential new shift in the ongoing evolution of EU memory politics.

[1] The periodisation of the evolution of the European Union's memory politics draws on the work of various scholars, with particular reference to the contributions of Aline Sierp listed in the bibliography.

2. Symbolic uses of history and mythical references to the past (1950s and 1960s)

A set of symbolic references to history can be traced in the legislative and discursive production of European integration and its leaders, constituting what has been called *the acquis historique communautaire* (Larat, 2005). Analysing the references to European history that emerge in the main treaties of the integration process, as well as in the official speeches of European leaders at significant moments in the construction of the Union, several intertextual thematic connections can be identified. These recurring elements emphasise the significance of the integration project as an acknowledgment of the horrors and divisions of the past and the assumption of responsibility through a creative political response that rejects historical determinism, framing Europe as a region in transition between a past of divisions and a future of integration. These narratives have the function of reinforcing the legitimacy of European integration as a positive and successful initiative, as well as supporting a process of *community building*. In this perspective, the idea of *acquis historique communautaire* suggests the existence of a set of guiding principles, objectives, and historical meanings deeply rooted in a certain interpretation of the history of European integration and disseminated in the legislative and discursive production of the EU. This symbolic corpus has no legislative value, but exerts normative pressure, for instance, in the accession of new member states to the Union (Larat, 2005). One of the earliest examples is the reference to the two world wars in the Schuman Declaration: "*A united Europe was not achieved and we had war".* A more explicit and direct reference to the long-standing problem of Franco-German rivalry follows: "*The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany"* (Schuman 1950). Similar references can be found in the fifth paragraph of the preamble to the Treaty of Paris (1951), in which the signatories contrast centuries of "*rivalry*" and "*bloody divisions*" with the turning point, or the year zero, of the foundation of the first European institutions.

The beginning of the era of European unity is signalled by the advent of supranational institutions for the new community of destiny. References of this kind can also be found in the ceremonial occasion of the signing of the Treaties of Rome (1957). The signatories and the invited local authorities described the meeting as a

turning point and a break, at least potentially, in the violent history of Europe, evoking mythical references to the unity and peace established by the Roman Empire (Larat, 2005). The speeches of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, according to whom the historic moment demonstrated the reawakening of "the *unifying will of Europe*" (Adenauer, 1957), and of Italian Foreign Minister Gaetano Martino, who expressed "*faith in Europe as a spiritual homeland*" (Martino, 1957), are relevant to our interpretation. The perception of being in the midst of a "historical moment" and the reawakening of the "unifying will of Europe", "slumbering for a long time", are emblematic examples of the symbolic, abstract, and mythical use of the past that prevailed in the early years of integration. The topic of "awakening" directly recalls the discursive strategies legitimising imagined national communities: nations are eternal, or as old as the world, but "dormant"; the emergence of nationalist movements sanctions their awakening and the foundation of nation-states their political-institutional realisation. The use of concepts such as "faith" and "spiritual homeland" is reminiscent of the symbolism of national secular religiosity (Anderson, 1983). Alongside other elements, these extracts form political narratives about Europe's past, which are intended to justify the integration process (Larat, 2005, 273–274). The past of European communities is referenced in terms of breaking with the cycle of ancestral violence, avoiding another European war, and building "*de facto* solidarity". This presents European unity as a project that is legitimised by its promise of perpetual peace, which is guaranteed not by the fickle will of men but by the solid wisdom of shared laws and institutions (Beattie, 2007). History is understood as *magistra vitae,* and symbolic references to the past are oriented towards the recognition of its tremendous lessons and, above all, the reinforcement of the image of European integration as a revolutionary political project aimed at the future and the construction of a new world (Calligaro, 2015). This symbolic use of history aims to legitimise integration in two senses: as a necessary and positive outcome of the historical process, whose alternative is political apocalypse; as a process rooted in a tradition of ideals, choices, and long-term visions (Larat, 2005)[2].

[2] Every selection entails removals. One example is the colonial question, at that stage still far from being a chapter, at least formally, closed. When France signed the Treaty of Paris as one of the six founding states and subsequently the Treaty of Rome, the French departments in Algeria were still associated with the European Community and would be so until 1962, the year of Independence and their "*subsequent disappearance, leaving virtually no traces*" (Pace, Roccu, 2020). More generally, the colonial possessions of France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy were associated with the newly created European Economic Community, as enshrined in Part Five (Association of Overseas Countries and Territories) and in particular in

From the outset of the integration process, the symbolic mobilisation of Europe's past has been evident not only in the EU's legislative output but also in the broader context of European governance and the pro-European intellectual community. This includes the awarding of prizes and titles to the great leaders of integration. One example is the Charlemagne Prize, which was established in 1949 by the Aachen Literary Society and is now awarded by the city of Aachen to individuals who have promoted European unity. Previous recipients include the Count of Coudenhove-Kalergi, Alcide de Gasperi, Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, and Simone Veil. Identifying Charlemagne as a precursor to European unity is a recurring mythical reference (Foret, Calligaro, 2019).

3. The memorialisation of European integration and European heritage (1970s and 1980s)

A significant shift has occurred since the 1970s, in the context of major transitions (enlargements[3]) and upheavals (oil crisis), gradually undermining the "permissive consensus" that was widespread in European public spheres (Sierp, 2021). At this stage, the memorial practices of European institutions developed along two main dimensions:

1. The "memorialisation" of the integration process's achievements and leaders.

Article 131 of the Treaty establishing the EEC: "*The Member States agree to associate with the Community the non-European countries and territories which maintain special relations with Belgium, France, Italy and the Netherlands*". A choice in line with one of the intentions stated in the Schuman Declaration concerning "*the development of the African continent*" (Sierp, 2020a). In this sense, according to Michelle Pace and Roberto Roccu, "*colonialism is silently inscribed in the genes of the European integration project since its origins*" (Pace, Roccu, 2020). Although the relationship between these macro-processes (European colonialism, decolonisation, and European integration) is complex and, in my view, neither linear nor straightforward, their overlap is undeniable.

[3] The accession of new member states, in fact, systematically brings with it the challenge of opening a new debate on the direction, origin, and meaning of European integration, with inevitable effects, more or less direct, on the level of symbolic policies. Nevertheless, the intra-national memorial divisions of the new members included in the EU, with the first, second (Greece, 1981), and third enlargement (Spain, Portugal, 1986) - e.g., the issue of the still recent Franco dictatorship - did not become a topic of political discussion in Europe. The willingness to invest energy and resources in planning for the future and common destiny seems to have prevailed, rather than dealing with the divisions of the past (Milošević, 2023).

2. The promotion of European heritage. European institutions began to consider the integrative potential of historical heritage and culture for strengthening the sense of belonging to a united Europe and for its legitimisation (Kaiser 2012: 114).

The process of memorialising the integration of Europe can be observed in the gradual proclamation and institutionalisation of a *pantheon* of fathers, mothers, and pioneers of a united Europe (Constantin, 2013), as well as in the awarding of prizes. For example, the European Council posthumously awarded the title "Father of Europe" to Robert Schuman in 1976[4]. Another example is the title of "Honorary Citizen of Europe", which was first awarded by the European Council to Jean Monnet in 1976 (Foret, Calligaro, 2019; Cohen, 2007)[5]. The identification of the *pantheon* of founding fathers and mothers was accompanied by the proclamation of the first commemorative celebrations. One example is Europe Day (9 May), which commemorates the Schuman Declaration as the founding act of European integration. This was proclaimed in 1985 at the European Council summit in Milan[6]. This choice has important repercussions: considering the Declaration as the "year zero" of integration, it promotes a certain historiographical perspective on the evolution of the European continent after the World Wars; it suggests that there is a *fil rouge* between the Declaration and the subsequent institutional steps toward deeper integration; finally, it affirms the continuity and coherence between the perspective expressed by the founding father and the concrete achievements of the following decades (Larat, 2005). These relations of continuity are reconstructed *ex post* and, although understandable from a symbolic and value perspective, at least in part questionable from a historiographical point of view: the Treaties of Paris fulfilled some of the promises made in the Declaration, but the failure of the

[4] This official and posthumous conferment has an important antecedent with the declaration by the European Parliamentary Assembly of Robert Schuman as "father of Europe" following his term as its President between 1958 and 1960. This element is of significance insofar as it encourages us to examine these "phases" with a critical eye and flexibility. While certain mnemonic tendencies prevail each time, this does not imply that there are no significant admixtures and overlaps between them.

[5] The process of identifying the pioneers of European integration is open to inclusions and reinforcements. As for the broader pantheon of fathers, mothers, pioneers, and leaders of the EU, there is no formal list, but an unofficial, non-exhaustive list, open to extensions. The same applies to the official commemorative calendar

[6] According to research by Hannes Hansen-Magnusson and Jenny Wüstenberg (2012), through a content analysis of various European newspapers between 1957 and 2007, the ritual and media attention on the Treaties of Rome (25 March 1957) increased at the expense of that on the Schuman Declaration (9 May 1950). This would show that the Treaties are publicly perceived as focal points of European integration, whereas the Declaration, despite being officially part of the official symbols of the Union, would be less so.

European Defence Community - a plan rejected by the French National Assembly in 1954 - and the European Political Community, as well as the shift in focus towards economic and market integration, abandoned others, namely the federal perspective.

At the same time, cultural policies focused more on history and heritage (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2018). It was at this stage that the concept of "European heritage"[7] emerged in the institutional lexicon[8]. This idea was absent in the early stages of the integration process, during which the protection and promotion of heritage were framed as matters of national interest. The 1957 Treaties of Rome, for example, in the face of the growing liberalisation of trade between member states, advocated the possibility of restricting or prohibiting free trade for the "*protection of national treasures possessing artistic, historic or archaeological value*" (Part II, Title I, Chapter 2, Art. 36).

The advancements that occurred in institutional discourse took place in a broader context. In 1972, UNESCO adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. At the Copenhagen Summit of the European Communities' member states on 14 and 15 December 1973, the "Declaration on European Identity" was adopted. The nine heads of state and government affirmed their willingness to work towards defining and recognising a clear European identity and heritage, and to obtain a clearer definition of their relations with other countries, their responsibilities, and their place in world affairs. In 1975, the Council of Europe launched the European Architecture-Heritage Year. In response to these developments, the European Parliament adopted a series of resolutions urging the Union to take action in this area. The first dates back to 13 May 1974 (EP 1974) and concerns the defence of "Europe's cultural heritage" and Community action in the cultural sector[9]. Cultural policies based on these ideas aimed to give substance to the narratives of European civilisation by linking them to material places of memory (Nora, 1984-1992). The most notable expression of this new trend is the "European City of Culture" programme, today known as the "European Capital of Culture", which was established through an intergovernmental initiative of the Council of the

[7] Related initiatives were already widespread in the broader sphere of European governance. In particular, the Council of Europe already launched the idea in 1954/55 within the framework of the "European cultural convention".

[8] The importance of the recognition, promotion, and protection of cultural heritage for the EU is enshrined in Article 3(3) TEU and Article 167 TFEU.

[9] This was followed by a resolution on the protection of the architectural and archaeological heritage (1982) and a further resolution in 1988 on "the conservation of the Community's architectural and archaeological heritage".

European Union in 1985. The programme aimed to highlight the artistic and cultural richness of a different European city each year, showcasing its contribution to broader European civilisation (Garcia, Cox, 2013). The choice of the first two capitals had strong symbolic meaning: Athens, the cradle of European democracy (1985), and Florence, the city of European humanism and the Renaissance (1986) (Patel, 2013). Added to this are the "European Heritage Days", first organised by the Council of Europe in 1985 and jointly supported by the European Commission since 1999[10]. In 1987, the European Parliament took the remarkable initiative of inaugurating the Jean Monnet House near Paris, acquired a few years earlier, as a place of European memory and a venue for political and cultural events (Deschamps, 2022). These initiatives sought to reinterpret the material and symbolic elements of the member states' heritage in light of their broader contribution to the definition of Europe's socio-cultural significance and civilisation.

At the same time, increasing attention was being paid to the traumatic legacies of the 20th century in certain national contexts and international forums. An approaching transition in EU memory politics was signalled by a political event of great symbolic value: Simone Veil, a survivor of Auschwitz, was the first elected President of the European Parliament in 1979.

4. Europeanisation of Holocaust remembrance and memory as a soft criterion for EU membership (1990-2005)

With the end of the Cold War, the 1990s witnessed "*an eruptive return of memory and a reawakening of history*" (Sierp, 2023), i.e. the re-admittance into the political and public space of frozen negative memories, shelved at the national and European level in the face of the prominence of the ideological and political dispute between capitalism and liberal democracies and communism (Judt, 1992; Wæhrens, 2011). In this phase, a reflexive elaboration on the painful and negative legacy of Europe emerged. The Holocaust burst into European discourses on

[10] For further information, see the website of the initiative: https://www.europeanheritagedays.com.

historical memory, becoming a central narrative canon. The transformation was remarkable: it was no longer a matter of elaborating a purely positive memory of integration and its openness to the future, nor of mobilising abstract symbolic references to the "conflicts of the past", but rather of confronting the memory of the genocidal tragedies of the 20th century and the Second World War, of Nazi-fascism and its victims, acknowledging national co-responsibilities and engaging in reparation - the so-called "politics of regret" (Olick, 2007). This negative memory was progressively adopted as a "defining myth" (Littoz-Monnet, 2013). The absolute ethical and moral opposition to the Holocaust became instrumental in legitimising EU values, its moral authority, and legal framework (Sierp, 2021; Stenlund, 2025). The prominence of this narrative was such that the national capacity to confront the memory of the Holocaust became a soft criterion for accession to the European project (Sierp, 2020b), its "entrance ticket" (Judt, 2005) or the so-called "Copenhagen Remembrance Criterion"[11] (Droit, 2007). This shift coincided with the EU's entry into the realm of memory politics and the construction of memory frameworks closer to national sensitivities (Sierp, 2020b; 2021). This process unfolded in parallel with similar dynamics occurring within member states, and the evolution of national public discourses and memory policies (e.g., Baldissara, 2016; Assmann, 2007; Judt, 1992; Focardi, Groppo, 2013). The Europeanisation of Holocaust remembrance, therefore, consists of

> the process of construction, institutionalisation, and diffusion of beliefs regarding the Holocaust as well as formal and informal norms and rules regarding Holocaust remembrance and education that have been first defined and consolidated at a European level and then incorporated into the practices of European countries (Kucia, 2016, 98).

This includes the adoption, in individual national contexts, of 27 January as Holocaust Remembrance Day. Various international organisations and networks, such as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and the United Nations, played a crucial role in the formation and institutionalisation of a "cosmopolitan European memory" (Levy & Sznaider, 2002, 87). It is probably the

[11] On closer inspection, coming to terms with the past became an explicit soft requirement for EU membership and for demonstrating the democratic credentials of the candidate countries as early as 1987, when the Parliament adopted a resolution on the Armenian Genocide (EP, 1987) and set its recognition as a constraint for the progression of relations with Turkey. Moreover, the adoption and negotiation of "EU memory frameworks" and the imperative to "dealing with the past" obviously have been playing a significant role in the negotiations for accession of the Western Balkans (Milošević, Trošt, 2020).

European Union, in the early 1990s, that was the first transnational agent to work towards the Europeanisation of this memory. In this sense, Europeanisation entails "EU-isation" - that is, the transfer and circulation of ideas across time and space among various European institutions and their actors (Flockhart, 2010; Sierp, 2023).

The European Parliament, at this stage, became the main EU actor in endorsing the first soft rules and regulations concerning the establishment of an international Holocaust Memorial Day and the protection of former Nazi death camps as negative heritage (Kucia, 2016). Parliamentary resolutions became a crucial soft-law instrument to steer institutional discussions, influence the direction of the EU, and stimulate public debates (EP 1993; 1994; 1995a; 1995b; 1996; 1998a; 1998b; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2003; 2005a). While the 1993 resolution does not use the term "Holocaust" directly, this changes with the 1995a resolution, which employs the concept for the first time in an official parliamentary statement. A geopolitical element that could contribute to explaining this transition is the War in Bosnia, which erupted in 1992 and ended in 1995. The conflict's dynamics of ethnic hatred echoed the tragedy of the Nazi camps, likely contributing to renewed engagement with Holocaust memory in public and institutional discussions (Wæhrens, 2011). The 2005a resolution marked the culmination of this phase, signalling full recognition of the Holocaust as the European memorial canon, and a soft criterion for EU membership. Meanwhile, an important transformation was occurring within the European fora: the Eastern enlargement and subsequent accession of former Eastern Bloc countries meant that the West had to deal with the Soviet Communist past, its crimes and victims (Kucia, 2016, 106).

5. European anti-totalitarianism and the politicisation of memory (2005-2019)

The XXI century opened with two events of absolute importance for the course of European integration. First, we should consider the failure of the draft Constitutional Treaty (2004) in 2005. The preamble includes important mythical references to the past: not only to the ancient divisions, but also to a founding heritage: Europe's cultural, religious, and humanistic legacies. In addition to these references are the

shared symbols of the Union, which refer to the repertoire typically belonging to nation states: anthem, flag, and currency. The draft Constitutional Treaty, rejected following the referendums in France and the Netherlands, was replaced by the Lisbon Treaty, stripped of many of the components and symbols typically associated with a state, including the flag, the anthem, Europe Day, and the term "constitution" itself (Streinz, 2008). Together with the material need to rethink a new treaty to amend, integrate and update European regulations, the failure of the Constitutional Treaty - and the downsizing of its symbolic/identity components - may have stimulated the search for alternative ways to strengthen the perceived legitimacy of the EU, prompting recognition of the importance of promoting not only European citizenship, but also European identity and a collective historical memory (Prutsch, 2015). This failed attempt coincided with a further disruptive event: the accession of new member states from the former Eastern Bloc (2004-2007). New historical experiences and memories were introduced into the discussions of European institutions. The EP proved to be a favourable political forum for the promotion of the new "anti-totalitarian narrative" in institutional positions (Littoz-Monnet, 2013). The institutionalisation of the Holocaust remembrance was followed by the EU-isation (Flockhart, 2010; Sierp, 2023) of a more broadly anti-totalitarian collective memory. The practices and narratives of European institutions in the field of historical memory tended to converge on this new canon. With this transition, the singularity of the Holocaust as a defining myth of European integration was called into question (Littoz-Monnet, 2013)[12]. 2005 is a crucial year for the development of the European Parliament as an institutional memory entrepreneur (Kaiser, 2012), or rather, in my view, for the politicisation of historical memory and growing dynamics of "intra-institutional memory activism" (Apollonio,

[12] Although, at this stage, anti-totalitarianism is a dominant canon in parliamentary discourses on remembrance and constitutes a partial point of convergence between various European institutions, it does not hold an absolute narrative monopoly. In certain institutional acts and moments, a willingness to commemorate lesser-known tragedies and historical events has emerged. Examples include the Armenian genocide, the genocide of Roma and Sinti during the Second World War, figures such as the "just" and "heroes", the colonial question, tragedies that occurred in the context of recent migrations, the victims of terrorist attacks in Europe, and, of course, the already-sedimented narratives on the achievements of the pioneers of European integration. Nevertheless, the prominence and visibility of certain memorial narratives are relative and have resulted in minimal repercussions on more tangible fronts, such as the cultural and educational initiatives of European institutions and the funding schemes of the Commission's programmes. This is particularly evident in the "memory of colonialism" and its intersections with European integration. While this topic sparsely emerged in discussions and declarations, it did not significantly impact the fundamental tenets of the discourse on European historical memory. Consequently, it did not result in the establishment of shared institutional frameworks or the formulation of substantive policies (Sierp, 2020a).

2025) within the EP. With two adopted resolutions (EP, 2005a; 2005b), which undoubtedly represented a symbolic turning point for European debates on remembrance, the contentious adoption of anti-totalitarianism as the new canon for a shared historical memory (for the first time explicitly framed as "European") began (Toth, 2019,1036). The process evolved over the following years and reached its peak in 2009 with the resolution On European Conscience and Totalitarianism (EP, 2009b), which sanctioned the definitive institutional shift from the Holocaust uniqueness paradigm to a more broadly anti-totalitarian one.

The clash between the memorial representations of East and West does not fully explain the complexity of the divisions emerging in this phase. This overlapped with the political competition between left and right and the attempt to strike at the latter, in particular the legacy of socialist and communist culture, as well as internal fractures within national delegations. Indeed, the fundamental opposition was that between the conservative Eastern European right and the Western European left (Toth, 2019). Some authors observe the emergence, among the newly elected representatives, of a markedly anti-communist political group, mainly composed of MEPs from Central and Eastern Europe and belonging to conservative right-wing parties, which challenged Western narratives on the representations of the Second World War and the uniqueness of the Holocaust, promoting the recognition of the tragedies and crimes of totalitarian communism (Neumayer, 2015; Toth, 2019; Dujisin, 2021). To speak, therefore, of a memory divide between East and West is a conceptual abstraction that does not take into account the real nuances and agency of the actors involved in EU memory politics. Research shows that the promotion of this new memorial canon was ultimately supported by a small group of "intra-institutional memory activists" (Apollonio, 2025) from Central and Eastern Europe and only became prominent through conflict, controversies, and negotiations. More precisely, the political dynamics of this phase were accompanied by the development of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary networks of "European memory entrepreneurs", such as "Reconciliation of European Histories", mainly (though not exclusively) comprised of Central and Eastern European conservative MEPs, and the "Platform of European Memory and Conscience", an international network of remembrance institutions endorsed by the EP (2009b) (Perchoc, 2015; Neumayer, 2015; Sierp, 2023, 86).

From 2005 to the present, the EP adopted various documents and positions on memory and historical consciousness, using parliamentary resolutions as privileged

soft-law tools (EP 2005b; 2005c; 2006; 2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2012; 2015). Through these resolutions, the Parliament has also enriched the commemorative calendar with new remembrance days. For example, resolution 2009b proclaimed 23 August as the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Totalitarianism, while resolution 2015 proclaimed 2 August as the annual European Day of Remembrance for Roma victims of the Holocaust. Finally, on 16 February 2023, the Conference of Presidents integrated 14 June, the Day of commemoration of Soviet deportations during the Second World War, into the Parliament's official calendar. The Conference adopted Roberta Metsola's proposal, which was in turn stimulated by a letter signed by 61 MEPs close to the informal group "On European Remembrance" (the successor to the aforementioned "Reconciliation of European Histories" group from the 9th legislature)[13], which already observed this anniversary autonomously (Apollonio, 2025).

In the new century, European politics of remembrance have found practical implementation in the European Parliament's museum initiatives, including the Parlamentarium, the House of European History, and the Jean Monnet House (Kaiser, 2012; Settele, 2015; Büttner, 2018), as well as in the Commission's cultural policies for public engagement. Examples include the European Capitals of Culture programme (Garcia, Cox, 2013) and European funding programmes for civil society initiatives. These programmes highlighted historical memory as a mechanism for developing Europeanised public spheres. Notable examples include the "Europe for Citizens" programme (2007–2020) and the "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values" programme (2021–2027). Funding for remembrance initiatives has been tied to certain topics and clauses, with variations in budget and approach. While a great deal of attention has been given to the crimes and genocidal tragedies committed by Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianisms, other topics have been also covered, such as European integration and, under CERV, the remembrance of slavery and colonialism.

[13]Although these are two distinct informal groups, it is possible to trace a line of continuity between the participants and supporters of the activities of the former and those of the latter (Apollonio, 2025).

6. New trends in EU memory politics: shifting from "reconciliation" to "securitisation"? (2019-today)

The previous paragraphs have provided an overview of how European institutions have developed their discourses and practices in the field of historical remembrance. Although EU memory politics emerged as early as the 1990s with the institutionalisation of Holocaust commemoration, it was mainly in the XXI century that it became a subject of debate, controversies, and intra-institutional activism, particularly within the parliamentary arena. This shift is evident in institutions' increased commitment to promoting memorial resolutions, museum initiatives, and cultural policies, as well as in the politicisation (de Wilde, 2011) of such discourses and the polarisation of parliamentary debates surrounding the adoption of the anti-totalitarian memorial framework.

In my opinion, new trends that signal potential developments in EU memory politics can be traced since the beginning of the ninth legislature in 2019. Evidence suggests that "collective memory" has shifted from being a tool for integration and reconciliation to serving as a strategic resource for EU foreign relations. This can be seen in debates on the resilience of European democracies against external interference and disinformation, as well as in deliberations on responses to international tensions and conflicts. In this sense, memory discourses are adopting an increasingly presentist posture (Calligaro, 2015). This tendency, which might be termed "mnemonic securitisation" (Mälksoo, 2015) - the use of memory as a means of countering informational and military threats from adversarial powers and ensuring the polity's ontological security - appears to indicate a novel application of memory: not merely as a means of promoting reconciliation between member and candidate states and fostering an "imagined European community", but also as a resource to counter geopolitical tensions and international conflicts. The first document to open this trend was the EP resolution on the importance of European memory for the future of Europe (EP 2019), in which the Parliament condemned the Kremlin's manipulation of historical facts for belligerent political purposes and

advocated for the promotion of a "European historical memory" (Barile 2021)[14]. This was followed by two further resolutions: one condemning Russia's unjustified attack and full-scale war while acknowledging Ukrainian memory narratives (EP, 2022); and the other condemning Russia's deliberate weaponisation of history for neo-imperialist purposes (EP, 2025). Against the backdrop of the Russo-Ukrainian War and the resulting momentum for enlargement, it appears that the European Union has further de-emphasised reconciliation in favour of securitising memory. This is evident in its expression of solidarity with Ukraine's European aspirations and wartime resistance, which is also demonstrated through mnemonic alignment (Apollonio, 2025). While commemoration has traditionally been represented in the EP's political discourse as a means of promoting justice, reconciliation, and integration within the EU and candidate countries, in the Ukrainian context, it emerges as a discursive framework aimed at delegitimising international conflicts, justifying international responses, and mobilising support for Ukrainian membership. Memory is engaged as a conflicting discursive field in confrontation with antagonistic powers, particularly the Russian regime. From this perspective, Ukraine's case reflects a shift towards the symbolic alignment of memory for strategic purposes. However, this trend is balanced by new opposing dynamics, namely criticism of the top-down imposition of European memory frames and previous memory policies. The resolution on "European historical consciousness" (EP, 2024) is the best example. This document supports the promotion of critical historical understanding as a collective skill from below, which is expected to foster democratic resilience and social cohesion. The simultaneous expression of divergent perspectives by the same institution signals political salience and evolving debates. The future of EU memory politics remains to be witnessed.

[14] Interestingly, this resolution did not go unnoticed but triggered immediate reactions and direct criticism from the Kremlin, namely Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova and Russian President Vladimir Putin himself (Apollonio, 2025).

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